

## Classic Tractor Pull A Mainstay Of Woodstock Fair



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By the time the classic tractor pull began at the Woodstock Fair on Sept. 2, more than 70 tractors filled the pull area or were parked side by side outside the gates.

There were Allis Chalmers', John Deeres, Massey Fergusons, McCormack-Deerings, Farmalls, International Harvesters – and all of them were 1965 models or older.

The Classic tractor pull is a mainstay at the fair. Three rows of bleachers were filled with onlookers. Tractor drivers mingled with each other in the pull area. They helped out during the pulls, hooking and unhooking chains, maneuvering cement blocks onto sleds, grading the pull area, measuring distances. Sometimes they'd give each other grief.

"Come on, Tom, push the choke in," Calvin Neely said from the announcer's booth as one driver tried to climb the hill with his tractor.

Neely has been an announcer for years at the pulls. Working at a tractor dealership has turned him into a walking encyclopedia of tractor designs and purposes. He shared a lifetime of knowledge as he announced the drivers, their tractors, and some of the machine's unique characteristics.

One tractor was the first of its kind to have full curtains around the engine. Another was the first to have a four speed transmission. Another had both a hand and foot clutch. Neely found something to say about each machine. And because he's been doing this for so long, he knows many of the competitors driving those tractors.

"After World War II, the tractor race really took off," Neely said.

Manufacturers were constantly changing tractor styles and farm implements to make them more appealing. As farmers' needs changed, the tractors changed to keep up with them.

Neely, Doris Gendreau, and Carmen Kallgren sat beside each other, keeping track of the competitors, classes, and results. Gendreau's husband, Ben, was in the pull for his sixth straight year. He'd always wanted an Allis Chalmers, and 10 years ago, he bought a D Series tractor. Then he joined the **Old Iron Tractor Club**. He heard about the pulls and has been a contestant ever since.

Kallgren's husband, John, is the superintendent of the pulling area. John manned the grader between every pull, smoothing out the clay until it was ready for the next tractor.

"He was weaned on tractors," his stepfather, Harold Foskett, said.

Foskett owns Foskett Equipment on Route 171. Foskett's been around tractors for decades, knows them inside and out, but admits to favorites.

"I like Farmalls," he said. "I grew up on Farmalls. John likes Allis Chalmers. Everyone is prejudiced."

With seven weight classes and up to 15 contestants per class, the pull went long into the night. The winners were the tractors that outlasted the others in each class, either by pulling more weight, or pulling it longer than all the others.

Everything about a pull is methodical and choreographed. All the tractors are weighed and registered. Hitches must be no higher than 20-inches from the ground. Drivers can only use stock weights. The 40-foot long pull area, filled with a special clay brought in for the purpose, is groomed for each and every pull. Besides that, the drivers have to forge their own secret strategies.

There's the feel of the machine, the relationship that a driver builds with it over the years. Some put the stock weights near the engine; some over the rear tires. Some 'twizzle' the sled's nose to get it moving on a second hitch. In the end, it comes down to competition and bragging rights.

"These are my friends," one driver said, "but I look at them differently when we're pulling."

Susan Converse-Webster waited her turn in the 8,000 pound class. This was her first tractor pull, but she'd been wanting to try it for years. Her grandfather and father both farmed and she drives tractors on occasion, sometimes pulling logs out of the woods.

"I was always interested," she said. "It makes you feel empowered."

Kallgren made his last sweep through the pull area at 1 a.m., after Andrew Zadora won the 8,000 pound class on his Farmall 450.

"We appreciate everyone coming out," he said. "We hope they all come back next year."

